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LABELING TECHNIQUES FOR INDICATING LEXICOGRAPHIC VARIATIONS IN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL USE OF WORDS WERE DISCUSSED. THE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT TECHNIQUES ARE NECESSARY, FOR EXAMPLE, TO DISTINGUISH VARIATIONS AMONG THE ENGLISH DIALECTS OF ENGLAND, AMERICA, CANADA, SCOTLAND, AUSTRALIA, AND SOUTH AFRICA. THIS REPORT IS ONE OF A SERIES OF 13 PAPERS PRESENTED AT A CONFERENCE ON LEXICOGRAPHY, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, NOVEMBER 11-12, 1960. (TC)

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THE LABELING OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL VARIATION IN POPULAR DICTIONARIES

by Allen Walker Read
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October, 1960

[1] When a language comes to be spoken over a wide area, divergences arise that cause problems for the recording lexicographer. A dictionary with the utmost rigor would of course be a word index of a single idiolect; but apart from scientific purposes this would not be useful generally. Any dictionary that has aspirations to general usefulness must take into account the regional variations throughout the area in which the language is spoken.

[2] In the English language, world-wide though it is, the primary split is between the English of England and that of America. The attempt to discriminate between what originated in one country or the other lies in the field of cultural history and illustrates how inter-disciplinary the field of lexicography is. The identifying of the word-stock that originated in America has been a continuing pursuit of scholars since the Rev. Jonathan Boucher in 1774 and culminated in Sir William Craigie's Dictionary of American English, printed from 1936 to 1944. It was based on a massive collection of illustrative examples, and I feel that the central practical procedure of lexicography will always be the gathering of documented evidence on all aspects of usage. This is laborious work, perhaps "donkey work," and can be mechanized, I think, only partially. Nevertheless I will welcome the time when we can give the order, "Switch on the lexicography machine."

[3] Sir William Craigie's plan called for marking a plus sign (+) before words or meanings that originated in the area that is

now the United States. Baffling problems often arose over this plussing, for the evidence was frequently not definitive and judgments might differ. When M. M. Mathews worked over the material again for his Dictionary of Americanisms (1951), he altered many of the decisions that had been made earlier. I find, in turn, that I am in disagreement with a number of his decisions. The weighting of evidence and the turning up of new evidence will, it is to be hoped, gradually clarify the problems.

[4] A typical example is provided by the word spittoon. Thornton in 1912 found an American example of 1840 and this was in time to be used as the first in the OED, along with an English example of 1841. The DAE carried the word back to 1823 with a quotation by an English traveler noting the absence of a spittoon at a certain American hotel. The DAE did not label it an Americanism, but Mathews, on the same body of evidence, did. The object referred to seems to have originated in England but was at first called a spitting dish or porringer.[1] Now the bit of new evidence that I can present is from a recently printed letter by Charles Dickens. In the course of his American tour, he wrote on March 6, 1842: "The jury are accommodated at the rate of three men to a spittoon (or spit-box as they call it here)."[2] He is contrasting the term that is natural to him, spittoon, with the new spit-box. I lay much stress on Dickens's feeling for the word in that early period. Inas-

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[1] The first reference to such an object that I have found is by Isaac Hawkins Browne, A Pipe of Tobacco (London, 1736), p. 21: "Let all be plac'd in Manner due, / A Pot, wherein to spit, or spue." Cf. also Adam Clarke, A Dissertation on the Use and Abuse of Tobacco (2nd ed.; London, 1798), p. iv: "One thing I find I have great cause of rejoicing in. The Sp-t-g Dishes are vanishing, from the whole circle of my acquaintance."

[2] The Letters of Charles Dickens (London, 1938), I, 395.

much as the first quotation of 1823 is by an Englishman, I think that the weight of evidence is in favor of spittoon as a Briticism rather than an Americanism. Other evidence could change the picture. Since about 1900 Englishmen have enthusiastically claimed spittoon as their own word, in contrast to the mealy-mouthed American euphemism cuspidor. When I investigate a single word in this way, I realize that I lay myself open to the accusation of being a mere antiquarian. But a sound labeling is dependent upon specialist studies of this type; and if one sees one's research in the larger pattern of working out social history, one can defend oneself against the charge of antiquarianism.

[5] But decisions on origin, fascinating as they are, do not seem to me as important in lexicography as the building up of bodies of typical usage. I regard it as unwise and unfortunate that both Sir William Craigie and M. M. Mathews chose place of origin as their criterion for an Americanism rather than currency in usage. Thus they have ignored one of the most important of the types of Americanism - that caused by survival in America with obsolescence in England. Questions of degree of currency are much more difficult to work with, since usage is fluid and the lines of distinction between England and America are often blurred. I have collected numerous bold statements that railroad is the American term and railway the British term, and yet in actuality usage is divided, with a certain preponderance in one country or the other. Since English capital was often invested in the early American railroads, the English lawyers drew up the papers and put the word railway into the official name of many lines. It is of interest that when Noah Webster first met these synonyms, his reaction was to establish an arbitrary

distinction between them. In a letter of June 21, 1830, he wrote as follows to the English editor who was bringing out an English edition of his dictionary:

> I believe rail-road & rail way are now used as synonymous - but it might be well to suggest under these words, that a useful difference might be made - Rail-road might be the name of the highway in which a rail-way is laid, but the rail way to be limited to the rails & appendages which support the vehicle. But this distinction will depend on circumstances, for I suppose the railway will often be made where there is no high way.[3]

[6] Sometimes a usage pattern will fall in a way that is surprising to the investigator. When the first two parts of the DAE had appeared, Miles L. Hanley reviewed them with sharp criticism, in particular because they included the terms auger and auger-hole.[4] I replied to the review and met nearly all the criticisms, except that I was willing to concede that auger-hole could well have been omitted.[5] To my surprise, Sir William Craigie was not willing to admit even this, and in an addendum to my review he wrote:

> As the use of the simple word [auger] is chiefly technical (the usual implement being the smaller gimlet) ordinary occasions for using it [in England] are not frequent. There is every probability that the different conditions in the two countries helped to maintain both auger and auger-hole in more general use in the United States than in England.[6]

In the more than twenty years that have elapsed since then, I have watched the words auger and gimlet carefully and I have found to my

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[3] To E. H. Barker, in MS Bodl. 1003, leaf 113, recto and verso (Bodleian Library, Oxford).

[4] Dialect Notes, VI (July, 1937), 590.

[5] Loc. cit., VI (Dec., 1938), 635-42, footnotes 3 and 19.

[6] Ibid., p. 643.

amazement that Americans really do have a predilection for auger and the English for gimlet. I have found, for instance, this direct statement by an English observer on the Indiana frontier in 1855: "In Europe four tools would have been required for this - a gimlet, a hammer, a plane, and a pair of pincers: here one sufficed. He [the American] never thought of using a gimlet."[7] One of my students, in a linguistic autobiography, utterly without coaching from me, wrote as follows: "The effect of these [British children's] books ... was to give me an English vocabulary. I used such words as gimlet, skirting-board, pipkin, and such expressions as 'the chimney wants sweeping.'"[8] The English have developed figurative uses of gimlet that are not known in America,[9] and a literary critic has noted Hardy's use of it.[10] The cocktail known as the gimlet originated in England,[11] and the derivatives gimlet-eyed[12] and gimlety[13]

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[7] J. Richard Beste, The Wabash; or Adventures of an English Gentleman's Family in the Interior of America (London, 1855), I, 278-79.

[8] Eunice E. Cleland, student paper of 1949.

[9] E. g., Major R. Raven-Hart, Down the Mississippi (Boston, 1938), p. 84, concerning mosquitoes: "I felt a need to examine the boat closely for leaks from their gimlets." Also Alun Lewis, The Last Inspection (London, 1943), p. 97: "Her gimlet eyes ... bored into you when she asked you 'personal' questions." Also C. Evans in John Bull, May 18, 1946, p. 14, col. 4: "Crowthers was older than Ianto had expected; a little gimlet of a man with glasses."

[10] See Alan H. Gardiner, The Theory of Speech and Language (Oxford, 1932), p. 168: "An instance recently quoted from Thomas Hardy is In the waves they bore their gimlets of light, said of lamps on a sea-wall; this use of the word gimlet appears to be quite unprecedented, nor is it likely to be repeated."

[11] An American traveler in England was constrained to explain it in 1928: Douglas B. Wesson, I'll Never Be Cured and I Don't Much Care (N. Y., 1928), p. 73: "The 'Gimlet' ... proved to be the well and flavorably known ricky, but described as 'gin, a spot of lime, and soda.'" It was remarked on in the Baltimore Sun, Nov. 9, 1933, p. 22, col. 3 (courtesy of Atcheson L. Hench): "The chiefs and petty officers [on a British ship] ... have their 'whisky and soda' and

can be found there. The derivative auger-eyed is not listed in any dictionary that I have consulted, but nevertheless it was picked up by Vance Randolph as current in the Ozarks in 1927.[14] I had supposed that the auger and the gimlet would be used in either country simply as those different instruments were needed; but the perceptive and acute observation of Sir William Craigie in 1938 seems to be substantiated by the pattern of the evidence. This is on the level of scholarly interest, however, and no regional labeling of either word would be expected in a popular dictionary.

[7] The identifying of a body of Briticisms is more difficult than identifying a body of Americanisms, because Americans have not held back from adopting anything that came their way. It is difficult to prove a negative, to show that certain expressions known to be current in England are absent in America. A device that I have found to be helpful is to search the writings of travelers who comment on words that are unfamiliar to them, especially of Americans in England. Their surprise at a term is circumstantial evidence

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'gin gimlet.'" Only in the past year or two an American sales company has been advertising a "Gimlet Mix" in newspapers and magazines.

12 E. g., J. Grantley in New Outlook on Motoring, Oct., 1946, p. 12, col. 1: "Think of a high police executive and you conjure up a picture of a gimlet-eyed, trim, super-efficient man." Also the London Observer, Sept. 19, 1954, p. 9, col. 7: "A sandy, gimlet-eyed, normally taciturn little man of fifty-six, he was born in Boldon in Durham." Also Kenneth Tynan in the London Observer, March 18, 1956, p. 15, col. 2: "'All for Love, or the World Ill Lost' is the message that issues from Shakespeare's gimlet-eyed indictment of Helen and Cressida."

13 Tim Carew in English Digest, July, 1955, p. 44, col. 2: "Corporal of Horse Pomfret ... subjected us to a dispassionate scrutiny. His gimlety eye fell on me."

14 "More Words from the Ozarks," in Dialect Notes, V (1927), 472; carried over to his Down in the Holler (Norman, Okla., 1953), p. 225.

that it does not have currency in America. Let me present three illustrations, one from the eighteenth century, one from the nineteenth, and one from the twentieth. In 1759 Jared Ingersoll, a Connecticut farmer, went to England to see if there had been any improvements in agricultural methods that Americans might adopt. He came across a topographical term that is still a Briticism - downs. In a letter of Dec. 22, 1759, he reported: "The high smooth hills, as in Sussex, having neither tree, stone, nor fence, - [are] called Downs, that yield a fine dry grass, improved for feeding thousands of sheep."[15] From the nineteenth century comes documentation for the equation of American mucilage with English gum. An American in London made the following report in 1878:

> To-day I wanted a bottle of mucilage. I went into a shop on the Strand, and had this experience with the young lady in charge: "Have you any mucilage ?" "Sir ?" with a puzzled expression. "Mucilage; paste, ... something which will stick some pieces of paper on other pieces. In this happy town of London is there such an article ?" I have an idea the girl got a little mad here, for she said sharply: "We've gang, if that's what you want." "What do you call it ?" "Gang !" earnestly and very loud. I am sure she said "gang." "Well, that may be it; never heard of it before, but I'll try it." She gave me a parcel. She was so angry that I was afraid to examine it at the store. When I reached my room I discovered it had "Gum" blown on the bottle, yet that English girl called it "Gang" as plainly as could be.[16]

From the present century comes a traveler's report of the "geezer" (geyser), the English contraption for heating water in a bathroom. As the actress Louise Hale described it in 1920:

> The aristocratic landlady was telling me of the advantages of her own particular geezer. ... I moved closer to descry the lettering on the cylinder, and lo ! it was a geyser. I suppose the word

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15 Printed by E. Edwards Beardsley, Life and Times of William Samuel Johnson, LL. D. (N. Y., 1876), p. 21.

16 American Bicycling Journal, Feb. 16, 1878, p. 11, col. 2.

is universally mispronounced over here because they have not been brought up in a geyser country. They probably pin their faith to the man who invented the first copper cylinder for heating water, he himself having picked the fanciful name out of the dictionary as a novelist picks heroines from a telephone-book.[17]

From such sources and others I have built up a body of nearly 10,000 entries, consisting of terms that could be labeled, if they were transferred to popular dictionaries, British or Chiefly British. The conspicuous Briticisms are for the most part labeled in American dictionaries of college size, although a reviewer of the current edition of the Merriam-Webster New Collegiate Dictionary was able to point out shortcomings in this regard. As he accurately said: "Yet in words like 'draper,' 'greengrocer,' 'pram,' 'spanner' and 'trifle' there is no hint anywhere that each of these is chiefly British in use. Try asking your garage mechanic to lend you a spanner for a moment, or your waitress to bring you a trifle with your coffee."[18]

[8] So far I have dealt with examples of divergences between Great Britain and the United States, and the political loyalties involved sometimes set the linguistic attitudes askew. The long history of Anglo-American bickering over language is a subject in itself, but these disputes make labeling a touchy matter. The average Englishman, accustomed to the labels Americanism, Scotticism, provincialism, etc., for designating locutions to be avoided, is unwilling to concede that his own speech may contain something called a Briticism. He has not caught up with the notion that the English

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17 Louise Closser Hale, An American's London (N. Y., 1920), p. 109.

18 Aaron Traister, in the N. Y. Times Book Review, May 15, 1949, p. 19, col. 3.

language now has many co-ordinate branches, and that American English has historical sources that are just as direct as those of British English. The glimmering of a change can be observed in a statement of a British scholar in 1954: "Americans are beginning to feel that they do not have to look to England for guidance in correct usage."[19] That, mind you, in 1954 ! I have even found an instance in which an Englishman expressed his certainty that Jesus would use British English rather than American English. An English traveler in the Bahamas heard a Negro preacher say that "Nassau was a wicked city." This followed the American custom of using *city* in a wide sense, in place of *village*, but the Englishman commented, "I thought that no doubt Jesus would call Nassau a village rather than a city."[20]

[9] Other nationalities within the English-speaking world give rise to the need for other labels. One of the most frequently overlooked of these is *Canadian*. The study of Canada's English has not had the attention it deserves, because it has lain in the shadow of the English of the United States and to a large extent has been part of an American complex. One of the few words labeled *Canadian* in the *OED* is the slang word *muffin*, illustrated from 1856, referring to a girl-friend or "steady." It was easy for this to deteriorate from its innocent sense, and by the 1870's no girl would admit to being a "muffin."[21] A surge of interest has taken place in recent

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[19] A. M. Macdonald, in *English*, X (Autumn, 1954), 96.

[20] R. S. Montague, in *The Humanist* (London), April, 1958, p. 14.

[21] Discussions of the term are given by Sir William H. Russell, *Canada: its Defences, Condition, and Resources* (London, 1865), p. 149; and by Robert Allan Fitzgerald, *Wickets in the West* (London, 1873), pp. 118-20.

years, fostered by the new Canadian Linguistic Association, and the gaps in our knowledge may one of these days be filled. There has been perennial interest in Australianisms, and rich collections have been made, but the best-known collector of them has complained that only about a dozen have been included in the Concise Oxford Dictionary.[22] Other parts of the world have branches of the English language with characteristic developments - New Zealand, the Philippines, India, South Africa, Ghana, the Caribbean, etc. - and each offers a challenge for the lexicologist to assemble the material that can be drawn upon by the general lexicographer.

[10] The problems of labeling are still with us even within a single country, when that country is as varied as the United States. The label Dial. for "dialect" leaves much to be desired. As used by the general public, the word dialect is accompanied by so many folkloristic misconceptions that it is hardly a useful term. The man-in-the-street will still tell you that dialect is a degraded, corrupted form of the standard language. Among American scholars, the term can be used without invidious effect, but still it has its dangers. I have been astonished to find that a scholar like André Martinet, of world-wide fame, has presented views that I regard as altogether wrong-headed. In a paper given at Harvard University on March 12, 1953, and since printed in Romance Philology,[23] he wrote as follows:

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[22] Sidney J. Baker, The Australian Language (Sydney, Australia, 1945), p. 15, footnote 28.

[23] Romance Philology, VIII (Aug., 1954), 1-11. In a widely circulated advertisement for the periodical, probably written by Dr. Yakov Malkiel, Martinet's contribution was described as "a brilliantly phrased, programmatic article."

> "Language" and "dialect" form a fairly clear opposition. ... Linguistically and sociologically, it makes a great difference whether a "dialect" is one of several equally legitimate forms of a given language or whether it is felt to deviate from an accepted standard. ... Thus we distinguish between dialects that are, so to speak, fully legitimate representatives of the language and opposed to it only as parts to a whole, and others that are, in a way, marginal and opposed to the language as something at least partially different. In this country [the U.S.], no one can help speaking a "dialect," because there is no form of speech which is not a dialect; in Europe generally, there is in every country a segment of the population which does not speak any "dialect," but the "language." [24]

I regard this as very bad doctrine indeed, representing a capitulation to the biases and prejudices of contemporary French culture. Although he uses the expression "legitimate form of a given language," he does not explain what makes a form "legitimate" and what "illegitimate." From an objective point of view, a so-called "standard language" is a form that has been accorded special prestige. The continued cultivation of it may make it seem truly superior, but to the linguist it remains a dialect that arouses a certain attitude in the participant of the culture. I believe that the members of the Académie française speak a dialect, albeit a prestige dialect. Martinet's use of the terms involves the incorporation of evaluations into our very terminology.

[11] I can imagine that Martinet might answer that it is the American point of view that does not face the realities. He regards the regional state of affairs in the United States as exceptional, calling it (ibid.) "probably unique on so large a scale." But in cultural history can be found the explanations why no one regional speech has achieved overwhelming prestige. Other cultural explanations can be sought to explain balances of prestige in French. He

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[24] Ibid., p. 3.

notes that in Great Britain, "linguistically, a cultured speaker from the Midlands does not rank with comparable southerners." But in England there is strong resentment against the self-assumed superiority of Southern English and champions can readily be found for Midland and Northern forms. The least that linguistic science can do is not to take sides, in its very terminology, either for or against the "Establishment."

[12] Equally shocking to me is Martinet's suggestion that patois should be adopted as a regular descriptive technical term.[25] The built-in prejudice of this term, in the culture of all countries where it is known, makes it decidedly undesirable. Nor will the term vernacular do, as it implies the contrast of a learned language like an active Latin. I do not mean to minimize the necessity of a copious terminology to describe the complications in the layering of Romance dialectization, of which Martinet is an outstanding master, but the suggestions of his that I have attacked seem to me most reprehensible.

[13] The labels for American dialects that were in vogue a generation ago have been considerably modified in recent years. It had long been known that Southern was a catch-all term for many sub-dialects that appeared in various parts of the South. The findings of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, in the perspicacious interpretations of its director, Hans Kurath, showed that the term Northern also had to be broken up. His postulation of a Midland type, moving westward from a Philadelphia matrix, is being tested in the continued investigations in the Middle West.

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[25] Ibid., p. 9.

[14] A term that is frequently met with, but suspect among scholars, is general American. The Linguistic Atlas materials, with their emphasis on origins and early divergences, would lead to a discarding of the term. Furthermore, it gives unfair advantage to the speakers of whatever it may be. The chief criticism, it seems to me, is that "general American" is misleading as applied to any dialect of the past. It can, however, reasonably refer to a pattern of speech that is now forming, largely a mixture of Northern and Midland as those two rub against each other in the Middle West.[26] I have a terminological suggestion to make about this emergent pattern. As it is the result of a process now taking place, I suggest that it should be called "generalized American." The new words in -ize are much criticized (finalize, funeralize), but the word generalized is very apt here in showing that a process is going on. As one listens to American speech, on the radio, in the academic classroom, and in casual conversation, one cannot help realizing that a leveling off of regional characteristics is taking place, an increasing substitution of schwa, the falling together of certain vowels. If a name is to be applied to this speech of the future, it might well be "generalized American." The term is much superior to "standard American," which we are otherwise likely to fall into.

[15] Whether a compromise English may be reached for the English-speaking world as a whole remains to be seen. One sometimes

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26 The best map that I know of to show this is that given by George R. Stewart (with the advice of David W. Reed), in his American Ways of Life (N. Y., 1954), p. 30. As Stewart says, p. 31: "It also shows the breakdown of colonial regionalism, and the mingling of the colonial stocks in the West, together with a growing domination of the speech of the middle colonies."

hears references now to a "mid-Atlantic accent" that has been achieved by actors or by public figures. As long ago as 1917 the classicist Paul Elmer More envisaged this future, and on the base of Hellenistic he coined the word Englistic to describe the tendencies he observed.[27] The popular dictionaries would primarily have to record this koiné or "Englistic" and the labelings would be reserved for disappearing forms from the old national and regional reservoirs. The working lexicographer will keep his eyes open for such developments.

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[27] Paul Elmer More, "English and Englistic," in Proceedings of the Special Meeting of the American Academy of Arts and Letters ... February 23, 1917 (N. Y., 1917), pp. 3-10, especially p. 5: "Has English entered upon a stage corresponding in any way to that of Hellenistic Greek ? ... Now 'hellenistic' is defined in the dictionary as 'resembling or partaking of a Hellenic character, but not truly Hellenic,' and as 'combining Greek and foreign characteristics or elements'; and by such a definition I am bound to say that much of the spoken and written language of this country at least is not properly English, but, if by analogy I may coin a barbarous word, 'Englistic.'" This appears again in Academy Papers (N. Y., 1925), p. 9.